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MAY 5, 1937 (WEDNESDAY)

THE MARKET BASKET
By
Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

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BUMPER FLORIDA CROP OF CELERY ON MARKET

May be Served Cooked in Delicious Dishes as Well as Raw

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A bumper crop of Florida celery is now being marketed throughout the United States. During the four months of February through May, Florida is the important celery producing state, shipping around 75 percent of the nation's supply during these months.

But this year Florida farmers ambitiously planted to celery a thousand acres more than last year, so there's an unusual supply of celery on the market. The peak of the crop came in April but plenty of it is still flowing north and west. Economists predict that more than 9000 carloads of celery will have rolled out of the state by June.

Some of this Florida celery will go into cold storage to fill the breach until the northern supply comes along, for June through September are the three slack months for celery growing. So though the Florida celery farmer's work practically ends this month, we'll be enjoying the fruit of his labors for some weeks to come.

Then the New York and Michigan crop will come along and reach its peak in October. By November California growers will have the lead and in December it will chiefly be California celery that reaches our tables.

Celery, by the way, is one of the most expensive and difficult of all the vegetable crops to raise.

When the shrewd shopper buys celery she examines the bunches carefully for color, shape, stalk length, compactness, and signs of age or damage. If the stalks are wilted, she probably won't take them.

About 99 times out of 100 she will insist on well blanched celery, for with practically all varieties blanching makes for greater tenderness and palatability. Celery of the grade called U. S. Fancy is always blanched to a creamy white.

Until recently there has been little green celery on the market. Two green varieties have been developed, however, that are fairly tender and delicious without blanching, though they also are often blanched. In their natural state they are a veritable grass green, mute evidence of a good supply of vitamin A, and since this nutritive gain is not greatly at the expense of flavor, they may yet become popular. So far even the finest green stalks could not be classified as U. S. Fancy but instead as U. S. No. 1 Green.

The shopper will, of course, examine the stalk to see if there are any growth cracks in the branches. If the cracks affect only two outer branches and aren't more than a half inch long, they need not especially disturb her. Even U. S. Fancy is allowed that amount.

The length of the celery branches is another indication of quality. In the U. S. Fancy grade the outer midrib--that part from the base to the first leaf node--must not be less than 6 inches long. U. S. No. 1 must have outer midribs averaging not less than 5 inches in length.

Another defect this shopper will try to discover is pithiness. She can press firmly on the stalks to see if they seem springy. Or she can give a branch a twist to see if it shreds and reveals a distinctly open texture with air spaces.

Satisfied as to the outward appearance of the celery bunch, the shopper might have a look inside, pulling out the branches enough to see if there is a seed stem already developed. A seed stem indicates poor flavor, sometimes even bitterness and a fibrous character. Of course, that stem could be cooked, not entirely wasted, but such celery is pretty poor stuff.

Pulling aside the outer stalks should also reveal any evidence of blackheart disease or of insect injury. Blackheart appears first in the young tender leaves of the heart as brownish discolored areas around the leaf margins and veins. These areas enlarge and finally become brownish black.

Cutworms do a lot of damage to celery. If the bunch is U. S. Fancy it will be guiltless of worms. Certainly the heart will never have been visited by a worm, and at worst not more than two of the outer branches will show evidence of any past visitation. Sometimes celery is trimmed down to hearts and sold minus the coarser stalks. These outer stalks may then be tied into bunches and sold separately for soups and stews.

Occasionally those outer stalks are sacrificed completely to develop an especially fine product. It's done this way. Down in a refrigeration plant the crates of celery selected for this treatment are put together and subjected to a temperature that will encourage molds to develop. The crates finally are a mass of mold. When the proper stage is reached the celery is washed, and the outer moldy stalks and leaves are trimmed away. Only the hearts are left, with an extra nutty flavor added to their crispness. This is not a common commercial practice, however.

The nutritionist is interested in celery chiefly as a rich source of calcium. People who are concerned with food only as a source of gustatory pleasure

prize it for its texture and flavor, especially raw.

Fortunately it keeps so well that much of it can be eaten raw. But there are always the tops and usually the coarser, older stalks which are better cooked.

Celery tops can be chopped fine and put into a meat or a salmon loaf to give it a more piquant flavor. Tops can always be cooked with the stalks for soups. Whenever there are more tops than can be used at once, they can be washed thoroughly, then dried and put away in a paper sack for future use in such dishes as meat loaf.

Some cooks like to lay a spray of celery leaves on top of a roast while it is cooking.

If the celery is to be cooked it should be started in boiling salted water. As some of the vitamins and minerals cook out into the water, this water should not be discarded. So it's a good idea to use as small a quantity of water as is safe to prevent it boiling dry. When the celery is tender (that doesn't mean cooked to pieces!) it may be seasoned with butter or meat drippings and served. Or it may be added to a white sauce.

Celery is advantageously combined with an equal quantity of turnips or carrots. It's good with tomatoes also--about 2 cups of cut celery simmered with a quart of tomatoes 20 minutes or so.

Celery is excellent in a stuffing for the less tender roasting pieces such as shoulder--say 2 cups of cooked celery pieces and leaves with 2 cups stale bread crumbs, some onion, butter, salt, and pepper.

These are but a few of the ways of conserving the coarse outer stalks of this vegetable delicacy.

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THE MARKET BASKET
By
Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOMEMAKERS MOBILIZE THEIR CANNING EQUIPMENT

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Canning time is just around the corner!

The buffetings of lusty spring rains and the radiance of spring suns have prodded gardens into luxurious growth. Over much of the country, asparagus, snap beans, peas and the like are, or soon will be, coming on faster than the family and the neighbors can eat them.

Now is the time to decide what and how much to can during this growing season to insure a well balanced and varied diet the year round. Canned foods are at their best the first year. So it's economy to can only what the family can use between now and next spring.

And for economy of time a person doesn't want to wait until canning morning to get equipment ready.

THE STEAM PRESSURE CANNER is the apparatus which first needs to be considered. It is an absolutely essential piece of equipment for safe canning of nonacid foods. And nonacid foods include all the vegetables except tomatoes, rhubarb, ripe pimientos and pickled beets, and all the meats.

"It may take 6 hours or more at boiling temperature (212°) to kill certain dangerous bacteria," reads Bulletin 1762 on "Home Canning of Fruits, Vegetables,

and Meats," written by specialists in the Bureau of Home Economics in Washington, and published last fall. But at 240° in the steam pressure canner, they may be destroyed in 30 minutes. Under home canning conditions, without this steam pressure canner, many stubborn and dangerous bacteria may never be killed.

Recent research on canning costs have shown that if fairly large quantities of food are canned, special equipment such as the pressure cooker add very little to the cost per container, over the period of time during which it is used.

So the woman who intends to can vegetables or meats but has no pressure equipment would do well to consider getting it before the canning season is upon her.

Home economists consider 18 to 30-quart capacity canners the most economical sizes for home use. Those for more than 30 quarts are too heavy for a woman to lift. Smaller ones are intended for meal cooking rather than for canning, and hold only a few jars at a time. Worse yet, it is almost impossible to operate such small ones to prevent fluctuation in pressure during the processing period.

A temperamental zigzag of pressure is bad for any product being canned, for it results in liquid being drawn out of glass jars. The result is loss of food value, and some of the vegetable or meat inside the cans being left high and dry to lose flavor and darken during storage.

As to the material of these steam pressure canners, either aluminum or steel is satisfactory. It's immaterial whether the top is held on by lugs, clamps, or a strong band. The chief concern of the purchaser should be to get a strongly built piece of equipment, with the top held on tightly enough that there can be no leakage of steam. The top must of course be fitted with an air outlet or petcock, a safety valve, and a pressure gage. The petcock and safety valve are sometimes combined.

If you already own a pressure canner it would be a good idea to inspect it carefully to see that it is in good condition. The safety valve must be clean and in working order. As valve construction varies with the different makes, you'll need to follow the manufacturer's cleaning instructions.

Openings to the petcock and the pressure gage also must be clean. The pressure gage itself ought to be checked against a reliable master gage to see that it is registering accurately, for so long as the gage works properly the pound-pressure indicates the temperature inside the kettle.

If no master gage is available, you can test the pressure gage with a maximum thermometer. It's much less expensive than the master gage--costs about $3. To test with this thermometer, set it into a bottle or some such container to protect it and hold it upright. Put the bottle on a rack in the canner, exhaust the air from the canner, and run the pressure up to 10 pounds. Then bring the pressure down to zero and read the thermometer. The mercury column of the maximum thermometer will stay at the highest point reached during the test period. Then run a second test at 15 pounds pressure.

Temperature and steam pressure rise and fall together. When the temperature reaches 250° F., the gage should register 15 pounds of pressure. When it's 240°F., pressure should be 10 pounds. These figures are for altitudes up to 2,000 feet. For each additional 2,000 feet, another pound of pressure should be added for those temperatures.

If the pressure gage is more than 3 pounds off, the best thing to do is to have a new gage put in, as for example, when the maximum thermometer registers 250° but the pressure gage shows less than 12 or more than 18 pounds.

Satisfied that safety valve and pressure gage are above reproach, you might examine the surfaces which form the closure between the pot and the cover to see

that they are clean and smooth. You can't expect the cover to stick tightly to the pot if edges are dirty or surfaces rough. Abrasives should never be used to clean these edges, for fear of making them rough. Use care, too, not to dent them.

CANNING CONTAINERS are the next group to mobilize for those approaching canning operations. If you use glass jars, you'll want to take a census of your empty ones, to find out how many are available, how many new ones you'll need to buy.

If they are the lightning-type modified mason jars, you'll need to test each wire clamp to see that it is tight. You can easily slip the wire out and tighten it by pressing down the middle with your thumbs, then snap it back into place.

If you have the automatic-, self-, or vacuum-sealing type of jar, that may mean new rubber rings, or caps with new gaskets.

When large quantities of food are to be canned in the home, there's a good deal to be said for tin cans. They won't break, they take up less room in the canner than do glass jars, processing them takes less time, they can be plunged into cold water as soon as they come from the processor so as to stop the cooking at once. And there can be no loss of liquid during the processing, whereas with even the best handling of glass jars, there is some loss. But tin cans cannot be used very successfully a second time.

Of course, use of tin cans means a sealing maching--and a good, strongly built one at that.

With pressure cooker and cans in readiness, one of these bright mornings you can go at canning your gardan surplus with no loss of time.

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THE MARKET BASKET
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GOOD STRAWBERRY YEAR;
PLENTY FOR PRESERVING

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Strawberries are having their inning this year. Boxes of the bright red berries in their green caps now line the market shelves and grace the carts of the street vendors. And prospects are fine for their continuing to be available throughout much of the country up to July. So the person who is fond of this fruit should be able to eat it this year to his heart's content.

Florida began the season by raising about 20 percent more strawberries than last year. Louisiana followed a bit tardily because of frosts but rallied to the tune of 500 to 600 cars of berries a week--which brought that state's total up a shade above normal.

With the advent of May came strawberries from Alabama, California, Arizona, and then North Carolina. And now as the crop from those states is tapering off come berries from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Virginia, though Arkansas isn't figuring as prominently in the strawberry picture as she usually does.

And here's advice for the woman who wants to put up some strawberry preserves and jam. The time to buy for such purposes is when picking in the nearest strawberry area is the heaviest.

As the season in any given section opens, inevitably quite a few green berries are picked. And as the crop dwindles, boxes will have some that are over-ripe, the tail-end of the supply. Eat the berries raw during these two periods.

Then watch for prices of local berries to come down. When the supply is heaviest they often sag to between $2 and $2.50 for a 24-quart crate. If your state isn't a strawberry state, watch the shipments from the nearest producing areas. Prices for you, of course, probably won't get quite so low.

The eastern and mid-western crop will be ushered in the last of this month, maybe earlier if weather is warm enough and the rains are encouraging. The states which come to the shipping front then will be Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, New Jersey, Missouri, and southern Indiana and Illinois. For the late supplies, in June and early July, we must look to the western and north central states: Oregon and Washington, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio. The west coast states grow enough for themselves right along, beginning almost as soon as the Florida shipping season does and continuing through July.

After mid-July all any section will get will be fruit from local patches of ever-bearing plants, berries picked for a more or less select trade and selling at fairly high prices. Such strawberries are now grown from coast to coast, mostly near metropolitan centers, and can be found on the market straight through into October.

In washing strawberries don't let the water from the faucet play on them. They are too tender to stand such treatment. Instead, put them into a bowl of water and then lift them out of the water with fingers somewhat apart to act as a strainer. The sand and soil on the berries will settle to the bottom of the container. For that reason don't pour the water off the berries. Unless they are quite dirty, two such rinses are usually sufficient.

Put them into a colander or some such utensil to drain. Then remove the caps. It's true that particles of dirt lodged underneath the cap cling more persistently than they do elsewhere. But it's better to rinse an extra time than to remove the cap first.

Above all things, don't let strawberries stand in water to lose color and flavor. If you want to sweeten the berries before serving them, cut them in halves, or chop rather than crush them so as to keep them as attractive as possible.

Americans need few suggestions as to ways of serving strawberries. This fruit has so long been a favorite that each family has its own pet dishes. For breakfast there may be a ring of the freshly washed, uncapped berries around a little cone of powdered sugar. Or the berries may grace the morning dish of cereal. For lunch perhaps they are in a fruit salad with bananas or fresh pineapple. For desserts--in gelatins, ice creams, ices, Bavarian cream, custard, or folded into whipped cream, or sweetened and used for a cake sauce. Just plain strawberries and cream are most satisfying to some people.

Strawberry short cake is a perennial favorite, of course. Another delicious pastry is fresh strawberry pie or tarts--a flaky crust filled with large, selected uncooked berries, and a clear strawberry sauce poured over them. To make the sauce, cook up small berries and strain them through cheese cloth. Sweeten, then thicken the juice slightly with corn starch, not flour. Flour would make it cloudy. Add some butter to give a brilliant, glazed look to the sauce, and a pinch of salt.

Then there's strawberry chiffon pie!

The season's surplus can be used for preserves and jam, the finest berries for preserves, the smaller for jam.

Heat is the arch enemy of color and flavor in strawberries; so preserving methods use the minimum of cooking. The Bureau of Home Economics suggests three different processes. For all methods 3 pounds of prepared fruit at a time is about the maximum for best results.

Proceeding according to Method 1 you would use a pound of sugar for each pound of the berries, and combine the two in alternate layers, then let them stand 8 to 10 hours before cooking. No water should be added, as the sugar draws enough liquid out of the fruit. As soon as they are ready boil them rapidly 15 or 20 minutes or until the sirup is rather thick. You'll need to stir it occasionally but carefully so as not to break the berries.

Method 2 utilizes small berries for juice to pour over the choice fruit. Crush these small berries and cook them about 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Strain. For each pound of the big berries take 1/4 cup of this juice and 1 pound of sugar. Heat the sugar and the juice slowly until the sugar dissolves, then drop the large berries into the sirup and simmer 3 to 5 minutes. Then boil rapidly 10 to 15 minutes or until the fruit is somewhat clear. Remove the scum and let the preserves stand over night in the kettle. The next morning fill hot sterilized jars three-fourths full of the drained berries, without re-heating them. Then boil the sirup rapidly until it is fairly thick, pour over the berries, and seal.

Method 3, sun preserving, can't be satisfactorily used unless the sunshine is hot enough to cause rapid evaporation. For each pound of choice berries take 1 pound sugar and 1 teaspoon lemon juice. Prepare a strawberry sirup from smaller fruits and sugar as in Method 2, add the berries and simmer 3 to 5 minutes. Then drain off the sirup and put the berries on shallow enameled pans or china platters. Boil the sirup 10 minutes, until it is fairly thick, remove the scum, add the lemon juice, and pour the sirup over the berries. Cover with a window glass propped up 1/4 inch from the plate. Sun for 2 or 3 days, until the sirup has jellied, turning the berries over every day. Without re-heating, put the preserves into hot sterilized jars, and seal.

For jams, strawberry and rhubarb make a fine combination, using equal weights of the two. Strawberry and fresh pineapple together also make a delicious jam, with half as much pineapple as strawberries. The pineapple should be boiled 10 minutes with an equal weight of sugar, before the strawberries and their quota of sugar are added.

The dietitian is interested in the strawberry chiefly as a source of vitamin C. It ranks along with the citrus fruits--among the important sources of this essential vitamin.

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REFRIGERATION ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR MEAT AND DAIRY PRODUCTS

With food prices inching upward from month to month, it becomes increasingly important that none of the food we buy should go to waste because of spoilage. And there's no single piece of home equipment quite so helpful in food preservation as the refrigerator. Especially in the good old summertime.

The coldest spot of that refrigerator should be dedicated to dairy products and meat. Both ought to have a temperature of 45°F., or below especially if they are to be kept more than 24 hours.

Where the coldest spot is depends upon the construction of the refrigerator. In the ice refrigerator, if the metal piece below the ice tilts back, the coldest place will be somewhere in line with the down current from the opening in the back. Where there are two metal sections separated by a space across the center, the cold air will drop down the center of the cabinet.

In a mechanical refrigerator, the coldest spot will be directly below the freezing unit. Most mechanical refrigerators, however, provide space for milk bottles beside the freezing unit instead of below. Though this isn't the coldest place, in the well insulated cabinet it probably is cold enough.

Then, too, some cabinets are so uniform in temperature because of the way the air currents move that there's only a degree or two of variation within the

food compartment. In others there may be as much as eight degrees variation. If you are in an experimental mood you might test your own refrigerator to see what variation it shows and determine exactly where the coldest place is.

Milk and cream bottles should be kept covered, because milk is by nature too hospitable to passing odors and bacteria for its own good. Desserts made of milk or cream, and creamed vegetable and meat dishes require the same treatment as the milk itself. All should be in the refrigerator's coldest area, and all should be covered. Butter should be kept in its oiled paper covering inside its box--or better yet in a covered butter dish. All fats should, of course, be kept covered because of their way of taking up odors. Lard and oils, however, needn't be in an especially cold place.

Oiled paper makes a good covering for containers if there is no cap or lid available. A square of the paper fitted over the top of the container and held down with a rubber band is quite satisfactory.

In some ice refrigerators you can find butter and milk bottles nestling against the block of ice--a practice frowned upon both by engineers and by home economists: the engineers, because the presence of any food in with the ice interferes with the free circulation of air along all sides of the ice, and may raise the temperature of the cabinet; the home economists, for this same reason and also because it puts butter, the very product that is most easily contaminated by odors, in the most odorous spot. You see, as the warmer air currents return to the block of ice they carry with them a load of odors from the various foods. These collect in the film of melting ice and run down the drain and are carried away. True, the milk bottle may be well capped and the butter in a covered dish so as not to take up odors. But too many times a housewife sets the butter in its thin oiled paper right on the ice cake, where it is in that odor laden film of moisture.

In the case of the mechanical refrigerator, odors collect in the frost on the evaporator, so that when the machine is defrosted they are carried along with the water into the defrosting pan.

Occasionally a "thrifty" housewife wraps the ice for her refrigerator in newspapers. If all she wants is to have ice to put into drinks, this is legitimate. But if her wish is to keep food in the cabinet in good condition she is working against that end. In an ice refrigerator you can't get a cool cabinet without melting ice, and heat in the food and in the cabinet cannot be so easily transferred to wrapped ice. Also vagrant odors cannot then be readily absorbed.

Meats require as much care as does milk. Before they are put into the refrigerator the wrapping paper should be removed, as a possible source of contamination in the cabinet. Then, too, it absorbs meat juices, and sticks so tightly to the meat surface that air cannot get at it, so that the meat will spoil more quickly.

Fresh meat should never be tightly covered in storage. Home economists advise putting it onto a shallow dish and setting it into the refrigerator, with at most no more than a piece of oiled paper laid on top, not wrapped around it. The cut surface of fresh meat is already so moist that it is particularly susceptible to contamination. A little drying out doesn't especially affect palatability and does slow up spoilage.

If the meat pieces are small--as with steaks and chops--they can be put into the freezing unit of a mechanical refrigerator unless ice cubes are too much in demand.

A good rule is to buy meat as near as possible to the time it is to be prepared. There may be as much as 6 percent loss in meat weight in some types of home refrigerators in 24 hours. It depends upon the refrigerator you have, as well as upon the size of the meat piece, the extent of the cut surface exposed, and the amount of fat on it.

With chopped or ground meats, like hamburger and fresh sausage, good refrigeration is doubly important. Such meats are usually made from small pieces, and as such have had greater chances of contamination in the meat market. And the very act of grinding a meat means increased possibility of contamination. Grinding releases meat juices. It distributes whatever bacteria may be present. It gives bacteria a larger surface to grow upon. Hence, such meats should be cooked soon.

Once meat has been cooked, it is more easily stored. It, too, must be kept cold and used soon, but it may be covered to prevent drying out. If you have left over meat pieces and plan to dice or grind them for dinner the next day, put them into a covered dish and cut or grind them shortly before they are needed. If the ground or diced meat is not to be reheated, this is especially important. Diced and ground meats spoil more quickly than do large sections of meat.

Cured meat won't spoil easily, but the fat in it can get rancid and it can become a medium for growth of molds. Bacon gets soft and flabby and develops an undesirable flavor and odor if it is kept in too warm a place. It may even become moldy. Bacon mold, however, is not toxic, so that it can be scraped off and the bacon used. Sliced bacon deteriorates in palatability if it is kept too long in the ordinary refrigerator.

In arranging food containers, avoid having them so close together that air can't circulate between them. A shelf crowded with sacks and other containers can block the passage of cold air to the sections below.

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